

# Reserve deputy who shot, killed man thought he drew his Taser, release says

A sheriff's release recounts the fatal shooting of a suspect.

- [Story](#)
- [Comments \(66\)](#)
- [Image \(4\)](#)

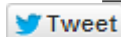
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72

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## RESERVE DEPUTY

**Bob Bates:** He was assigned to the Violent Crimes Task Force and had specialized training in homicide investigations.

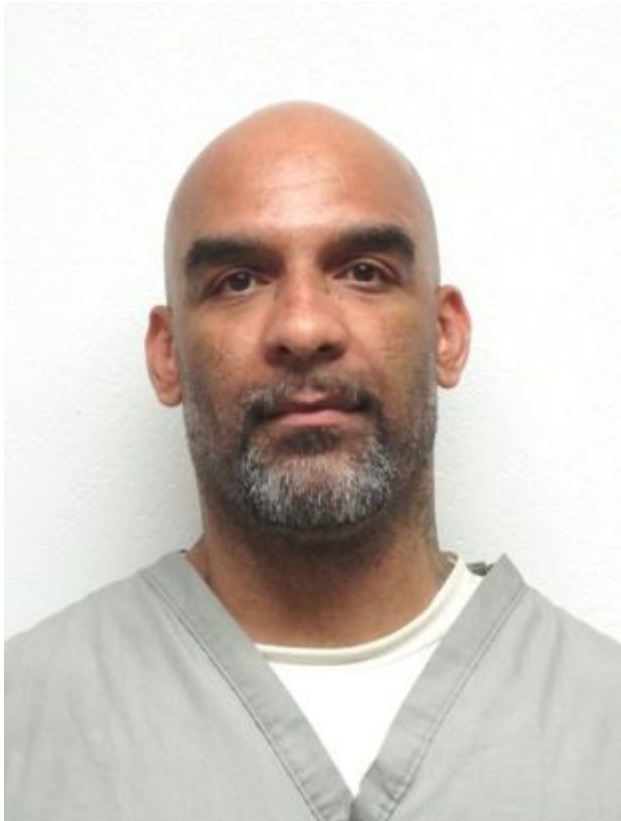


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## SLAIN

### Eric Courtney

**Harris:** According to reports, Harris was shot as he was trying to escape arrest by an undercover Tulsa County reserve deputy.



Eric Harris

### **Sheriff's office media release**

Here is the full media release from the Tulsa County Sheriff's Office:

Tulsa County Sheriff's Office (TCSO) Investigators are continuing an investigation into yesterday's shooting involving a reserve deputy assigned to the Tulsa County Violent Crimes Task Force.

The preliminary investigation has determined that on March 26, 2015, the TCSO Violent Crimes Task Force initiated an investigation into the distribution of a form of methamphetamine referred to as ICE. As the investigation continued over the next several days, an undercover Task Force member made several purchases of ICE from numerous individuals, including Eric Harris. During the course of the transactions, Harris, a convicted felon, also advised he could provide for the sale of a sawed off shotgun and added he had access to other guns for sale. On April 2, 2015, Harris agreed to meet the task force member at 10 a.m. at the Dollar General parking lot located in the 2000 block of North Harvard Ave. in Tulsa, Oklahoma and sell him a 9mm semi-automatic pistol, along with three-hundred rounds of ammunition.

After the transaction took place, an arrest team of deputies approached the car to advise Harris he was under arrest and take him into custody. Before that could be accomplished, Harris exited the vehicle and confronted undercover deputies. As Harris fled northbound, into the southbound lanes of North Harvard Avenue, deputies observed him reaching for his waistband area near his hip, causing concern for the deputies' safety.

After a brief foot pursuit, a deputy attempted to physically restrain Harris. As Harris continued to resist arrest, the struggle went to the ground where Harris refused to pull his left arm out

from underneath his body where his hand was near his waistband. During the rapidly evolving altercation, the reserve deputy had what he believed was his Taser from his tactical carrier and attempted to render aid in subduing the suspect. Initial reports have determined that the reserve deputy was attempting to use less lethal force, believing he was utilizing a Taser, when he inadvertently discharged his service weapon, firing one round which struck Harris.

Harris continued to actively resist for a brief time before being subsequently subdued and handcuffed. EMSA was summoned immediately and first aid was rendered until Harris was transported to a local hospital. Preliminary information has revealed that Harris was possibly under the influence of Phencyclidine, a street drug commonly known as PCP, by his own admission to medical personnel at the scene. Harris was pronounced deceased at an area hospital. The medical examiner has yet to determine the cause of death.

Tulsa County Sheriff's Investigators will continue to compile information and conduct interviews to determine a precise conclusion into yesterday's event. The reserve deputy will be interviewed by investigators on Monday and, following the conclusion of the interview, the Sheriff's Office will release his name. The Tulsa County Sheriff's Office is classifying this situation as a tragic event.

Posted: Saturday, April 4, 2015 12:00 am | Updated: 1:07 am, Wed Apr 15, 2015.

By DYLAN GOFORTH World Staff Writer [166 comments](#)

A 73-year-old reserve deputy who shot and killed a fleeing suspect Thursday during an undercover operation believed he was holding a Taser, not a gun, when the shooting occurred.

The reserve deputy who shot the man is Robert Charles Bates, a Tulsa insurance company executive who was working undercover Thursday as a member of the Tulsa County Sheriff's Office Violent Crimes Task Force.

Bates confirmed in a phone interview with a Tulsa World reporter Friday that he shot and killed Eric Courtney Harris the previous day.

"It was me," Bates said during the interview. "My attorney has advised me not to comment. As much as I would like to, I can't."

The Sheriff's Office on Friday evening released Bates' name and said he received his reserve status in September 2008.

The release states that Bates was assigned to the Tulsa County Violent Crimes Task Force and had received specialized training in homicide investigation, meth lab identification and decontamination, and other specialized training.

Bates had also spent time with the Tulsa Police Auxiliary and then as a full-time police officer, according to the release.

Bates, who owns an insurance company, served as chairman of the Re-elect Sheriff (Stanley) Glanz Committee in 2012 and donated \$2,500 to Glanz's campaign that year.

Records show Bates has held an insurance brokers license since 1966 to sell property, life, health and accident insurance. His license expires in 2016.

Harris fled arrest Thursday and was involved in an altercation with another deputy when he was shot, Maj. Shannon Clark said. Clark said in a release Friday that Harris had come to the attention of the Sheriff's Office during an investigation into methamphetamine distribution.

Harris sold meth to undercover investigators and said he had access to guns, as well, Clark said in the release. On Thursday, Harris met a task force member in the parking lot of a Dollar General at 1906 N. Harvard Ave. to sell him a 9 mm semi-automatic pistol and ammunition, then ran when other deputies tried to take him into custody.

Court records show that six criminal felony cases and one misdemeanor case were filed against Harris in Tulsa County District Court over a 10-year span. His convictions include making threatening telephone calls and escaping from a penal institution in 1990, as well as robbery with a dangerous weapon in 1999. He also was found guilty of forging a document and two counts of larceny, records show.

Bates, according to the release, saw Harris reach near his waistband as he fled from pursuing deputies and responded by pulling out what he thought was a Taser. After Harris became involved in a struggle with another deputy, Bates, thinking he was using a Taser, fired one shot, striking Harris. "During the rapidly evolving altercation, the reserve deputy had what he believed was his Taser ... when he inadvertently discharged his service weapon, firing one round which struck Harris," according to the media release issued by the Sheriff's Office.

Harris was treated at the scene by EMSA and died less than an hour later at a Tulsa hospital, according to Clark.

Clark said "preliminary information" has led investigators to believe Harris was under the influence of PCP at the time of the shooting.

Tulsa Police Department homicide Sgt. Dave Walker said Friday that although the homicide took place in the city limits, TPD would not investigate the death unless the Sheriff's Office asked them to.

"And they have not asked us to," Walker said.

Bates was named Reserve Deputy of the Year in 2011, according to the Sheriff's Office website.

Clark said Thursday that it's not unusual for a reserve deputy to be on an assignment such as the Violent Crimes Task Force.

"What I will say is that the deputy had the specialty training to be assigned to this task force, similar to what a full-time deputy would have had," Clark said Thursday.

Clark said the Sheriff's Office has more than 100 reserve deputies, all of whom go through the same training components as a normal deputy but with an abbreviated curriculum.

Reserve deputies "have full powers and authority" of a deputy while on duty, he said.

At 10:30 a.m. Thursday, attorneys for Bates were in Tulsa County District Court for a hearing in a civil lawsuit in which he is the defendant, records show. The pre-trial hearing was held in District Judge Jefferson Sellers' courtroom, with attorney Clark Brewster and two other attorneys representing Bates, records show.

Bates is being sued by his former insurance agency, Robert C. Bates LLC, in Tulsa County District Court.

He formed Robert C. Bates Inc. in 1977 and sold the agency in 1999. Bates remained as head of the new company, Robert C. Bates LLC, until resigning in 2012, records show.

He now operates Commercial Insurance Brokers LLC, at 4200 E. Skelly Drive, records show.

World Enterprise Editor Ziva Branstetter contributed to this report.

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[http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/crimewatch/reserve-deputy-who-shot-killed-man-thought-he-drew-his/article\\_67394595-5b09-59d1-a791-ae543e4cfc1.html](http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/crimewatch/reserve-deputy-who-shot-killed-man-thought-he-drew-his/article_67394595-5b09-59d1-a791-ae543e4cfc1.html)

**Tulsa, Oklahoma (CNN)** The Tulsa County deputy who shot and killed a man instead of using his Taser now faces a manslaughter charge.

[Video shows Reserve Deputy Robert Bates announcing he is going to deploy his Taser](#) after an undercover weapons sting on April 2, but then shooting Eric Courtney Harris in the back with a handgun.

In a written statement, Tulsa County District Attorney Stephen A. Kunzweiler said Bates is charged with second-degree manslaughter involving culpable negligence. It's a felony charge that could land the volunteer deputy in prison for up to four years if he's found guilty.

Scott Wood, an attorney who represents Bates, said the shooting was an "excusable homicide."

"We believe the video itself proves that it was an accident of misfortune that occurred while Deputy Bates was fulfilling his duties as a reserve deputy," Wood said. "He is not guilty of second-degree manslaughter."

Investigators' efforts to defend Bates and the other deputies involved in the arrest [have sparked a mounting chorus of criticism online](#). Harris' family is demanding an independent investigation of what they call unjustified brutality.

They're also [questioning why the 73-year-old Bates -- the CEO of an insurance company who volunteers as a certified reserve deputy -- was on the scene](#) in such a sensitive and high-risk sting operation.

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/13/us/tulsa-police-shooting-eric-harris-deputy-charged/>